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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire administered to 124 international students who matriculated at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) in fall 1987 elicited responses on the students' secondary school activities, personal and educational goals, difficulties expected in achieving their academic and vocational goals, and their attitudes toward the University. More than two-thirds of the respondents were male, and the majority (58%) identified themselves as Asian. Most of the goals listed were related to academics. The average age was 25 years; almost all expected to receive graduate degrees and 60% expected to pursue doctoral degrees. Almost half of the respondents said they decided to attend UMCP because the University offered the kind of academic program they wanted. Students were certain about their own strengths and weaknesses; perceived themselves to be not easily discouraged; and reported that they needed assistance in learning how to budget their time efficiently, achieve satisfactory grades, and earn expenses for school. Students expressed interest in participating in intramural sport programs, academic clubs, and music and drama organizations. Includes 11 references. (JDD)

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SELF-APPRAISAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPECTATIONS

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This study was conducted in cooperation with the Office of International Education Services, University of Maryland, College Park.

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Summary

A ninety-item questionnaire was administered to international students (N = 124) who matriculated at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) in Fall 1987. The items elicited responses on the students' secondary school activities, personal and educational goals, difficulties expected in achieving their academic and vocational goals, and their attitudes toward the University.

More than two-thirds of the respondents were male and the majority (58%) identified themselves as Asian. Most of the goals listed (66%) were related to academics. Whereas the average age was 25 years, almost all (94%) expected to receive graduate degrees and sixty percent expected to pursue doctoral degrees.

Almost half (45%) of the respondents said they decided to attend UMCP because the University offered the kind of academic program they wanted. Although many were ambivalent about their chances of earning a B average, they believed that they were more likely to earn a baccalaureate degree than temporarily drop out of school. It is apparent from the aggregate responses to several items that respondents felt certain about their own strengths and weaknesses. However, many were not sure about their personal comfort in a new academic environment.

While the number of international students on U.S. campuses has increased over the last decade, several studies have indicated that their needs are not usually met (Goodwin & Nacht, 1982; Millet-Sorenson, & Crownhard, 1985). Other studies have identified the special needs of these students (Erikson, & Hoang, 1980; Hull, 1985; Manese, Leong, & Sedlacek, 1985; and Carter, & Sedlacek, 1986).

Educators are often curious about the cultural, educational and personal backgrounds of international students who come from so many different countries. It is difficult to delineate the special needs of these students because of the diverse cultures they represent. It would be interesting to find out what the students' real goals, needs and aspirations are during their sojourn in the U.S. It is reported that many of these students have good academic backgrounds, positive feelings about their institutions, and high motivation to succeed in school (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988). It is also suggested in the literature that students who get involved in school activities and community services tend to do well in their academic pursuits (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984; Abrahamowicz, 1988).

The purpose of this study was to discover: (a) the self perception of international students; (b) their attitudes toward themselves and their institution; (c) the quality of academic and social skills they bring to their new environment; and (d) the quality of their involvement in co-curricular activities and the

leadership skills they developed while they were in secondary school.

METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

A ninety-item questionnaire was administered to international students (N=124) who enrolled at the University of Maryland, College Park in Fall 1987. The items elicited responses on the students' secondary school activities, personal and educational goals, difficulties expected in achieving their academic and vocational objectives, and attitudes toward the University.

All international students who participated in a one day orientation conducted by the Office of International Education Services completed the survey during a one-hour session. Staff and graduate research assistants of the Testing, Research, and Data Processing Unit of the Counseling Center helped in collecting data.

RESULTS

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Student Characteristics

The majority of the students were male (80%). Most of these students identified their race as Asian (58%) and White (25%). Forty-four percent of the students were from Asia, mostly from the Republic of China (27%). Others were from the Middle East (18%), Europe (17%), Central America (6%), South America (3%), Africa (2%) and the Pacific (2%).

Most of the students (65%) have been living in the United States for less than a month. Twenty-one percent had lived in the U.S. for two months to one year. The age of the participants ranged from 16 to 38 with a mean age of 25.

Almost all (94%) of the students expected to receive a graduate degree. A large majority (60%) of the students expected to pursue a doctoral degree. The most likely perceived causes for not receiving a degree were lack of finances (15%) and academic difficulties including disinterest in study (11%).

Analyses of data on questions related to currently held goals revealed the following: Most of the goals listed first (66%) were directly related to academic objectives (e.g., obtain a B.A. degree). Sixteen percent of the goals were non-academic (e.g., get married) or related to involvement in school-based social clubs (e.g., join a student organization).

Almost half (46%) of the goals listed as top priority could be achieved during the students' undergraduate years (e.g., buy a car), whereas those listed frequently in the second place (44%) and in the third place (49%) were of a general nature and set for the immediate future (e.g., join an academic club).

When asked to list accomplishments they were proud of, respondents provided a list nearly half of which (46% listed first and 45% listed second) could be classified as comparable to accomplishments that the top 25% of U.S. students might claim (e.g., President of the National Honor Society).

When asked about their involvement in student organizations, respondents listed many activities (25% listed first and 18% listed second) similar to those in which 25% to 75% of U.S. students participate. Forty-nine percent indicated that they belonged to one to three organizations in secondary school, 16% participated in four to six groups and 35% were not members of any organization.

Many respondents (44%) participated in groups where some type of leadership was possible. Twelve percent joined groups (such as a school band) where student leadership was less likely. Twelve percent held recognized leadership positions, nearly all of which were in organizations that were non-academic. Only a tenth of these activities involved some type of service to the community. Most of the groups may be classified either as special interest or those providing services to a secondary school.

Whereas only 13% of the students were actively involved in community service activities while in secondary school, almost all (90%) believed that "everyone must work toward improving social conditions." The majority (76%) of the students also agreed with statement that "the University should use its influence to improve social conditions in Maryland."

PART 2: EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE UNIVERSITY

The main reasons why students decided to attend the University of Maryland were : academic programs offered (45%), geographic location of the campus (16%), and recommendation by parents and relatives (10%).

Ninety percent of the problems students identified included the following five major aspects of college life: budgeting time and studying efficiently (34%), earning satisfactory grades (19%), obtaining expenses for school (18%), getting to meet and know other students (11%), and finding out who can provide help when needed (9%).

The most frequently selected activities of interest to students were as follows: intramural sports (32%), academic clubs (21%), music or drama organizations (14%), communication/publication media (11%), and special interest groups other than sports, games and hobbies (11%).

To make the University of Maryland more attractive to prospective students, participants suggested that the University strengthen academic programs (36%), lower costs (23%), and reduce enrollment (12%).

PART 3: SELF-APPRAISAL, EXPECTATIONS OF SUPPORT AND CLARITY OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL GOALS

In response to items related to leadership roles (Table 1), most participants chose the neutral response indicating that they did not consider themselves as leaders. However, they tended to feel that they were good at getting others to go along with them.

Table 1

Self-Appraisal of Leadership

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
10	I was a leader in secondary school	2.68	1.07
17	In groups where I am comfortable, I am often looked to as a leader	2.77	.89
33	My friends look at me to make decisions	2.75	.79
45	I usually come up with ideas that my friends end up doing	2.98	.82
55	I am sometimes looked up to by others	2.51	.86
57	I am not good at getting others to go along with me	3.64	.83

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

Although many of these students were not quite sure whether they would attain a B average at UMCP (Table 2), they expressed confidence that they were "as skilled academically as the average applicant to UMCP." They also disagreed with the statement that "chances are good that I will drop out temporarily before I complete a baccalaureate degree." They agreed with items related to seeking tutorial assistance when needed, and maintaining contact with faculty.

As shown in Table 3, respondents tended to prefer contact with others (item #30), to establish friendships (item #29) and to trust and help other people (item #16). They expressed uncertainty on items such as "I keep to myself pretty much," (item 49) "I don't like other people telling me what to do," (item 50) and "I enjoy going along with what a group liked to do" (item 63).

It appears (Table 4) that overall, international students are not quite sure whether they will "have a harder time than most students at UMCP," (item #18) or how they will react when treated unfairly" (item #40) or if they "encounter racism" (item #34). In contrast, they pointed out that they were certain about their own strengths and weaknesses (item #39 and 43), they don't get easily discouraged (item #13), and they try to find opportunities to learn new things (item #37).

Table 2

Self-Appraisal of Academic Efficacy

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
12	It should not be very hard to get a B (3.0) average at UMCP	2.63	.93
21	I am as skilled academically as the average applicant to UMCP	1.93	.77
27	I want a chance to prove myself academically	1.54	.64
28	My high school grades don't really reflect what I can do	2.98	1.23
26	If course tutoring is made available on campus at no cost, I would attend regularly	2.10	.93
44	Contact with faculty is important to academic success	1.45	.63
66	I don't expect to get to know faculty personally during my first year	3.80	.92
70	Chances are good that I will drop out temporarily before I complete a bachelor's degree	4.19	.85
71	I expect to have relatively little contact with faculty	3.80	.96

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

Table 3

Self-Appraisal of Social Efficacy

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
16	There is no use in doing things for people; you only find that you "will get in trouble" in the long run	4.27	.75
23	People can pretty easily change me even though I thought my mind was already made up on the subject	3.91	.82
29	I find I get more comfortable in a new place as soon as I make some good friends	1.79	.73
30	I enjoy working with others	1.89	.68
49	I keep to myself pretty much	2.85	.98
50	I don't like other people telling me what to do	2.71	.86
63	I enjoy going along with what a group likes to do	2.63	.85

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

Table 4

Self-Appraisal of Emotional/Personal Comfort

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
13	I get easily discouraged when I try to do something and it doesn't work	3.65	.96
18	I expect to have a harder time than most students at UMCP	3.10	1.90
34	If I encounter racism, I believe it is up to me to always point it out and correct it	2.56	.81
37	I try to find opportunities to learn new things	1.54	.72
39	I have a good understanding of my strengths and weaknesses	2.05	.72
40	When I am treated unfairly, I express my anger in no uncertain terms	2.83	.97
43	I know the areas where I am weak and I try to improve them	1.74	.66

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree,

3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

It is apparent, from the items listed in Table 5, that international students were very comfortable in knowing that they had the support and encouragement of significant others to pursue their academic objectives. They also expected to receive assistance when needed.

International students expressed the opinion that they were not certain whether they preferred to be spontaneous (item #52); or to take things one day at time to avoid getting into problems (item #62), or there is any advantage to making 10-year plans (item #56; see Table 6). They would rather prefer to make daily lists of things to do and act on things they strongly believe in. Most students also endorsed the statements that "Once I start something, I finish it" (item #19), and "When I believe strongly in something, I act on it" (item #20).

Although they come from countries whose cultures are different from those of the United States, participants felt that their background should help them "fit in well at UMCP" (item #32; see Table 7). Nevertheless, they were not certain whether they will encounter racism (items #22 and 38); interact exclusively with people from their own country (item #31 and 67); be "picked on" by students and faculty because of their background (item #41), or stay on or off campus (item #69).

Table 5

Self-Appraisal of Expected Family Support

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
15	If I run into problems concerning school, I have someone who would listen to me and help me	2.19	.94
24	My friends and relatives don't feel I should go to college	4.61	.83
25	My family has always wanted me to go to college	1.53	.82

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

Table 6

Self-Appraisal of Planning (Persistence)

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
19	Once I start something, I finish it	1.85	.80
20	When I believe strongly in something, I act on it	1.74	.71
46	I often make lists of things to do	2.16	1.00
52	I prefer to be spontaneous rather than to make plans	3.42	.86
56	I know what I want to be doing 10 years from now	2.52	1.14
62	The best way to avoid problems is to take things one day at a time	2.65	1.03

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

Table 7

Self-Appraisal, Racial/Culture Attitudes

Item #	Statement	Mean*	S.D.
22	I expect to encounter racism at UMCP	3.17	.92
36	I am uncomfortable interacting with people from other races or cultures	3.89	1.15
38	I think many people see racism where it doesn't exist	2.88	.82
31	My friends are exclusively from the same country as I am	3.44	1.14
32	My background should help me fit in well at UMCP	2.11	.71
35	I expect the faculty to treat me differently from the average student here	3.52	.98
41	I expect to get "picked on" by other students and faculty because of my background	3.39	.95
51	I expect to find lots of people who are like me at UMCP	2.52	.90
67	I expect to have little contact with students from other countries	3.62	1.18
69	I would prefer to live on campus rather than be a commuter student	2.79	1.17

*Likert Scale Scores: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly disagree

DISCUSSION

Results of this study indicate that a great majority of the participants (86%) had been in the United Sates for less than a year. Almost all expected to receive a post-baccalaureate degree. Most of these students listed specific goals mostly related to academic objectives. They were attracted to UMCP mainly because of its academic programs and suggested that the institution strengthen such programs to attract outstanding students.

Although many students were not certain if they would attain a B average at UMCP, they expressed confidence in their abilities to compete well with the average U.S. student. However, most were not sure whether they will be "picked on" by students and faculty or encounter racism because of their cultural and academic background. It appears that they have adopted a "wait and see" attitude.

Nevertheless, they felt confident about achieving their academic and career goals largely due to the support and encouragement they expect to receive from significant others. Many of the students indicated that they needed assistance in learning how to budget their time and study efficiently, achieve satisfactory grades and earn expenses for school. They expressed interest in participating in intramural sports programs, academic clubs and music and drama organizations.

It may be useful for the University to provide services designed to enhance the stated goals and interests of international students. We recommend that orientation programs

be geared to reassuring the students on the existence of a supportive academic environment and teaching them appropriate coping strategies.

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